

Attorney General Becerra is a leader in protecting reproductive rights. He is a leader in expanding mental healthcare services. He is a leader in the fight against the opioid epidemic. He is a leader for LGBTQ health and for ending the disparities.

We are in a racial justice movement now, a racial justice movement that is seeking to end those deep disparities, causing twice as many people in communities of color to die during the pandemic and only half as many now to have the vaccine so far because we have lived through 4 years of dishonesty and disregard for science and 4 years of attacks on our healthcare system, particularly for the underserved.

That is the challenge, among others, that Attorney General Becerra will confront. He will be vigorous, brave, and tough, and he will work to lower the cost of prescription drugs. He will take on those interests that may be against the healthcare goals and purposes of the American people. And we need him now more than ever in this critical position. I urge my colleagues to vote for him tomorrow when we have the chance to do so.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSOFF). The Senator from California.

GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I want to begin by joining with so many of our colleagues and leaders around the country expressing our condolences to the victims of the senseless shootings in Atlanta yesterday, in sharing our thoughts and prayers to their families and friends. Our heart goes out to the greater community, and, of course, we stand here to not only try to understand better what happened, how it happened, but do the work necessary to try to ensure that it doesn't happen again—not in Atlanta, not anywhere in the United States of America.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of the nomination of my friend California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to serve as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

As we all know, as we all feel, our Nation is going through one of the toughest health crises in our history. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an incredible toll on our country. Every State has been impacted. Every community has suffered, especially working-class communities and communities of color, like the very neighborhoods that Attorney General Becerra and I grew up in. These communities are hurting and people are dying at alarming rates, and they desperately need someone who knows these communities to their core.

Throughout his career, Xavier Becerra has always fought to improve the lives of his constituents. As the first Latino attorney general of California, he made it his mission to tackle the structural inequalities in our healthcare system. As has been ref-

erenced already, Attorney General Becerra was the leading force behind the lawsuit to protect the Affordable Care Act. Yes, he had the audacity to maintain protections for people with preexisting conditions and for those suffering from a mental illness. Over the course of this past year, he has also fought to protect frontline healthcare workers from further exposure to COVID-19.

Xavier Becerra's parents emigrated from Mexico, just like my parents did, with a dream of building a better life for themselves and their family. Just a few days ago, I spoke in this Chamber about my family's history and journey in this country. A hard-working short-order cook and housekeeper raised the son who now serves in the U.S. Senate. The same is true for Xavier Becerra's family. He, the son of a construction and clerical worker, is on the verge of becoming the most important health official in our Nation. That is the American dream.

But, unfortunately, tragically, over half a million Americans have had their dream cut short by COVID-19, over half a million lives lost and millions more lives upended by this pandemic. We need to act with urgency to end this crisis—urgency.

But as I rise today to address this Chamber, urgency is severely lacking. While millions of Americans continue to struggle, our Republican colleagues are dragging things out, playing politics with the confirmation of Attorney General Becerra, one of the most qualified nominees to lead the Department of Health and Human Services that this Chamber has ever considered. They have distorted his record.

Let me point out that many Members of this Senate have worked alongside Xavier Becerra here in Congress for decades. Republicans and Democrats know Xavier Becerra is both a thoughtful leader and someone who is always willing to listen to both sides of an argument. He built an outstanding reputation in the House, both as a legislator and as a colleague.

As attorney general of California, overseeing the largest department of justice in the Nation, second only to the U.S. Department of Justice, Xavier showed no fear in working across the aisle. In fact, he partnered with Republican attorneys general to increase access to lifesaving drugs to treat COVID-19. He worked across the aisle to protect drug discounts for health centers.

I can't help but point out the obvious. In fact, I am prepared to make this abundantly clear to the American people. The cynical delays and political games that we see being played are not actually about Mr. Becerra's qualifications. He is just as qualified as any of his predecessors. Sadly, Xavier Becerra is being held to a different standard—a different standard than other nominees this Chamber has supported and confirmed over the last 4 years, including our most recent Health and Human Services Secretary.

Let me also say this. As some of the first Latinos in our respective positions, both Xavier and I are not unfamiliar with being held to a different standard. It is a different standard today that is so stark that our colleagues are willing to delay his confirmation through the night. Yes, in the middle of a global health pandemic, Republicans are holding up the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. They are holding up the first Latino nominee to head this critical agency during a pandemic that has disproportionately devastated the Latino community.

It is time to let Xavier Becerra get to work. I urge my colleagues to end the delay on Xavier Becerra's confirmation for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Thank you, Mr. President.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on confirmation: Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, Rollcall vote 123.

Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on cloture motion: Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, Rollcall vote 124.●

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

CONFIRMATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

• Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Katherine Tai to serve as the next United States Trade Representative. When confirmed, Ms. Tai will be the first woman of color and first Asian American to lead the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Katherine Tai's story is America's story. Her parents came to the United